DICTIONARY OF NATIONALITY EXPRESSIONS

A comprehensive guide to idioms, phrases, and expressions derived from countries and nationalities, with definitions, origins, and translations.

A

American dream
Definition: The ideal that every US citizen has equal opportunity for success and prosperity through hard work.
Origin: Coined by historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book "The Epic of America," though the concept existed in various forms throughout American history.
Portuguese: sonho americano
Spanish: sueño americano
Italian: sogno americano

Arabian Nights
Definition: A collection of Middle Eastern folk tales; used to describe something exotic or fantastical.
Origin: From "One Thousand and One Nights," a compilation of stories from the Islamic Golden Age, translated to European languages in the 18th century.
Portuguese: As Mil e Uma Noites
Spanish: Las mil y una noches
Italian: Le mille e una notte

Argentine tango
Definition: A passionate partner dance characterized by close embrace and intricate footwork.
Origin: Developed in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the late 19th century, blending African, European, and indigenous influences.
Portuguese: tango argentino
Spanish: tango argentino
Italian: tango argentino

B

Balkan powder keg
Definition: A volatile region or situation ready to explode into conflict.
Origin: Refers to the Balkan Peninsula in the early 20th century, whose political tensions led to World War I.

Portuguese: barril de pólvora dos Bálcãs
Spanish: polvorín de los Balcanes
Italian: polveriera dei Balcani

Belgian compromise
Definition: A solution that satisfies no one completely but is acceptable to all parties.
Origin: From Belgium's complex political system requiring constant negotiation between French and Dutch-speaking communities.
Portuguese: compromisso belga
Spanish: compromiso belga
Italian: compromesso belga

Bohemian
Definition: A person with artistic or literary interests who disregards conventional standards of behavior.
Origin: From Bohemia (now Czech Republic), mistakenly thought to be the origin of the Romani people, who were associated with unconventional lifestyles.
Portuguese: boêmio
Spanish: bohemio
Italian: bohémien

Brazilian wax
Definition: A hair removal technique that removes most or all pubic hair.
Origin: Popularized in the 1990s by the J Sisters, seven Brazilian siblings who opened a salon in New York, reflecting Brazilian beach culture.
Portuguese: depilação completa / depilação brasileira
Spanish: depilación brasileña
Italian: ceretta brasiliana

British stiff upper lip
Definition: Maintaining composure and not showing emotion, especially during difficult times.
Origin: Victorian-era British ideal of emotional restraint and stoicism, particularly among the upper classes.
Portuguese: estoicismo britânico / manter a compostura
Spanish: flema británica
Italian: flemma britannica

Brussels sprouts
Definition: Small, cabbage-like vegetables.
Origin: Named after Brussels, Belgium, where they were extensively cultivated in the 16th century.
Portuguese: couve-de-bruxelas

Spanish: coles de Bruselas
Italian: cavoletti di Bruxelles

C

Chinese fire drill
Definition: A state of confusion or chaos; a pointless exercise.
Origin: American term from the 1940s, considered offensive, possibly from naval exercises or racial stereotypes.
Portuguese: confusão total / caos
Spanish: caos total / desorden
Italian: caos totale / confusione

Chinese puzzle
Definition: A very complex or intricate problem.
Origin: From traditional Chinese puzzles like tangrams and interlocking wooden puzzles, popular in the West since the 19th century.
Portuguese: quebra-cabeça chinês / enigma complexo
Spanish: rompecabezas chino
Italian: rompicapo cinese

Chinese wall
Definition: A barrier to information flow, especially in business to prevent conflicts of interest.
Origin: From the Great Wall of China, used metaphorically in financial services since the 1920s.
Portuguese: muralha chinesa
Spanish: muralla china
Italian: muraglia cinese

Chinese whispers
Definition: A game where a message becomes distorted as it's passed along; miscommunication.
Origin: British term from the early 20th century, considered offensive by some as it stereotypes Chinese languages as incomprehensible.
Portuguese: telefone sem fio
Spanish: teléfono descompuesto / teléfono roto
Italian: telefono senza fili

Colombian necktie
Definition: A gruesome method of execution involving cutting the throat and pulling the tongue through.

Origin: Associated with violence during La Violencia period in Colombia (1948-1958).
Portuguese: gravata colombiana
Spanish: corbata colombiana
Italian: cravatta colombiana

Cuban heel
Definition: A moderately high, tapered heel on boots or shoes.
Origin: Named after Cuban dance shoes from the early 20th century, popularized by flamenco and tango dancers.
Portuguese: salto cubano
Spanish: tacón cubano
Italian: tacco cubano

D

Danish pastry
Definition: A sweet, flaky pastry often filled with fruit or custard.
Origin: Ironically, developed by Austrian bakers in Denmark in the 19th century, but became associated with Danish baking.
Portuguese: folhado dinamarquês
Spanish: pastelería danesa
Italian: dolce danese / pasta danese

Double Dutch
Definition: Language or speech that is impossible to understand; gibberish.
Origin: English term from the 17th-18th century Anglo-Dutch rivalry, implying Dutch was incomprehensible.
Portuguese: grego / incompreensível
Spanish: galimatías / incomprensible
Italian: incomprensibile / arabo

Dutch auction
Definition: An auction where the price starts high and is lowered until someone buys.
Origin: From 17th century Dutch flower auctions; the term also reflects Anglo-Dutch commercial rivalry.
Portuguese: leilão holandês
Spanish: subasta holandesa
Italian: asta olandese

Dutch courage

Definition: False bravery or confidence induced by alcohol.
Origin: From the 17th century, when English soldiers were said to drink Dutch gin (jenever) before battle during the Anglo-Dutch Wars.
Portuguese: coragem de bebida / coragem artificial
Spanish: valentía etílica / valor de borracho
Italian: coraggio da bevanda / coraggio liquido

Dutch door
Definition: A door divided horizontally so the top and bottom can open independently.
Origin: Common in Dutch farmhouses and brought to America by Dutch colonists in the 17th century.
Portuguese: porta holandesa
Spanish: puerta holandesa
Italian: porta olandese

Dutch oven
Definition: A thick-walled cooking pot with a tight-fitting lid, typically made of cast iron.
Origin: From Dutch casting techniques for brass pots in the 17th century; English merchant Abraham Darby adapted the process for iron.
Portuguese: panela de ferro / caçarola de ferro
Spanish: horno holandés / olla de hierro
Italian: pentola di ferro / casseruola olandese

Dutch treat
Definition: An outing where each person pays their own expenses.
Origin: From 17th century Anglo-Dutch rivalry, implying Dutch frugality or stinginess.
Portuguese: cada um paga o seu
Spanish: pagar cada uno lo suyo
Italian: pagare ognuno per sé

Dutch uncle
Definition: A person who gives frank, stern advice.
Origin: American term from the early 19th century, possibly from German "Deutsch" (German), conflated with Dutch, referring to stern German-speaking immigrants.
Portuguese: conselheiro rigoroso
Spanish: consejero severo
Italian: consigliere severo

E

English breakfast
Definition: A full breakfast with eggs, bacon, sausages, beans, toast, tomatoes, and mushrooms.
Origin: Traditional British meal that became standardized during the Victorian era as a symbol of prosperity.
Portuguese: café da manhã inglês
Spanish: desayuno inglés
Italian: colazione inglese

English muffin
Definition: A round, flat yeast-leavened bread, typically split and toasted.
Origin: Developed by English immigrant Samuel Bath Thomas in New York in the 1880s, based on crumpets.
Portuguese: muffin inglês
Spanish: panecillo inglés
Italian: muffin inglese

F

French doors
Definition: A pair of doors with glass panes extending most of their length.
Origin: Popular in French architecture during the Renaissance, allowing more light into rooms.
Portuguese: portas francesas
Spanish: puertas francesas
Italian: porte francesi

French kiss
Definition: An intimate kiss involving tongue contact between partners.
Origin: Early 20th century American term, associating the French with romantic passion and sophistication.
Portuguese: beijo de língua / beijo francês
Spanish: beso francés
Italian: bacio alla francese / bacio con la lingua

French leave
Definition: To depart without saying goodbye; leaving secretly or without permission.
Origin: 18th century British term, from the French custom (filer à l'anglaise) of leaving parties without formal farewells to avoid tedious goodbyes.

Portuguese: sair à francesa / sair sem se despedir
Spanish: despedirse a la francesa
Italian: andarsene all'inglese

French letter
Definition: British slang for a condom.
Origin: 19th century British term, possibly attributing the invention to the French, or associating France with sexual matters.
Portuguese: camisinha / preservativo
Spanish: condón / preservativo
Italian: preservativo

French manicure
Definition: A nail style with pale pink base and white tips.
Origin: Created by Jeff Pink for Orly in the 1970s for versatility in fashion shoots; named to sound sophisticated.
Portuguese: manicure francesa
Spanish: manicura francesa
Italian: manicure francese

French paradox
Definition: The observation that French people have low heart disease rates despite a diet high in saturated fats.
Origin: Coined in the 1980s by French scientist Serge Renaud, attributed to moderate wine consumption.
Portuguese: paradoxo francês
Spanish: paradoja francesa
Italian: paradosso francese

French toast
Definition: Bread soaked in beaten eggs and milk, then fried.
Origin: Ancient dish; earliest recipe from 4th-5th century Rome. Term "French toast" appeared in England in 17th century.
Portuguese: rabanada
Spanish: torrijas
Italian: pan fritto / french toast

G

German chocolate cake
Definition: A chocolate cake with coconut-pecan frosting.

Origin: Named after Sam German, who developed a type of chocolate for Baker's Chocolate Company in 1852, not the country Germany.
Portuguese: bolo alemão de chocolate
Spanish: pastel alemán de chocolate
Italian: torta tedesca al cioccolato

German measles
Definition: Rubella; a contagious viral infection.
Origin: First described in detail by German physicians in the 18th century, hence the name.
Portuguese: rubéola
Spanish: rubéola
Italian: rosolia

German shepherd
Definition: A breed of working dog.
Origin: Developed in Germany in the late 19th century by Max von Stephanitz for herding sheep.
Portuguese: pastor alemão
Spanish: pastor alemán
Italian: pastore tedesco

Go Dutch
Definition: To split the bill equally, each person paying their own share.
Origin: From 17th century Anglo-Dutch rivalry, implying Dutch frugality or that sharing expenses was a Dutch custom.
Portuguese: rachar a conta / dividir igualmente
Spanish: pagar a la americana / dividir la cuenta
Italian: fare alla romana / pagare ognuno per sé

Greek to me
Definition: Something incomprehensible or meaningless.
Origin: From Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" (1599): "But for mine own part, it was Greek to me," referring to the difficulty of understanding ancient Greek.
Portuguese: grego para mim / chinês para mim
Spanish: es chino para mí
Italian: è arabo per me

H

Hawaiian pizza
Definition: Pizza topped with ham and pineapple.

Origin: Created by Canadian Sam Panopoulos in 1962 in Ontario; named "Hawaiian" after the canned pineapple brand.
Portuguese: pizza havaiana
Spanish: pizza hawaiana
Italian: pizza hawaiana

Hollywood smile
Definition: A set of perfectly white, straight teeth.
Origin: From the glamorous appearance standards of Hollywood actors, particularly from the 1920s onward.
Portuguese: sorriso hollywoodiano
Spanish: sonrisa de Hollywood
Italian: sorriso hollywoodiano

Hungarian notation
Definition: A naming convention in computer programming.
Origin: Developed by Hungarian programmer Charles Simonyi at Microsoft in the 1970s.
Portuguese: notação húngara
Spanish: notación húngara
Italian: notazione ungherese

I

Indian file
Definition: A single-file line of people walking one behind another.
Origin: From the practice of Native Americans walking in single file to hide their numbers and create fewer tracks.
Portuguese: fila indiana
Spanish: fila india
Italian: fila indiana

Indian giver
Definition: (Offensive) Someone who gives a gift then takes it back.
Origin: From colonial misunderstanding of Native American gift-giving customs, which involved reciprocity, not permanent ownership transfer.
Portuguese: (expressão ofensiva, evitar uso)
Spanish: (expresión ofensiva, evitar uso)
Italian: (espressione offensiva, evitare uso)

Indian summer
Definition: A period of unseasonably warm, dry weather in autumn.

Origin: American term from the late 18th century, possibly referring to Native American harvest time or warmth of "Indian territories."
Portuguese: veranico / verão de São Martinho
Spanish: veranillo de San Martín
Italian: estate di San Martino

Irish coffee
Definition: Coffee with whiskey, sugar, and cream.
Origin: Created by Joe Sheridan at Foynes Airport, Ireland in the 1940s to warm cold passengers.
Portuguese: café irlandês
Spanish: café irlandés
Italian: caffè irlandese

Irish goodbye
Definition: Leaving a social gathering without saying goodbye.
Origin: American term from the late 20th century, similar to "French leave," reflecting stereotypes about Irish behavior at social events.
Portuguese: saída irlandesa / sair sem avisar
Spanish: despedida irlandesa
Italian: uscita all'irlandese

Irish twins
Definition: Siblings born less than a year apart.
Origin: American term from the 19th century, stereotyping Irish Catholic families as having many children in quick succession.
Portuguese: irmãos irlandeses
Spanish: gemelos irlandeses
Italian: gemelli irlandesi

Italian job
Definition: A sophisticated or stylish heist or criminal operation.
Origin: From the 1969 British film "The Italian Job" about an elaborate gold heist in Turin, Italy.
Portuguese: trabalho italiano / golpe sofisticado
Spanish: trabajo italiano
Italian: colpo all'italiana

Italian shower
Definition: Using cologne or perfume instead of bathing.
Origin: Stereotype suggesting Italians use fragrance as a substitute for washing, considered offensive.
Portuguese: banho de gato (expressão análoga)
Spanish: ducha de gato (expresión similar)

Italian: (espressione offensiva)

J

Japanese tourist
Definition: Stereotype of tourists who take excessive photographs.
Origin: From the observation of Japanese tourists frequently carrying cameras in the late 20th century when cameras were less common.
Portuguese: turista japonês
Spanish: turista japonés
Italian: turista giapponese

Java (coffee)
Definition: Slang for coffee.
Origin: From the Indonesian island of Java, a major coffee producer since Dutch colonial times in the 17th century.
Portuguese: café / java (gíria)
Spanish: café / java (jerga)
Italian: caffè / java (slang)

Jersey barrier
Definition: A concrete barrier used to separate traffic lanes.
Origin: Developed by the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey in the 1950s.
Portuguese: barreira Jersey
Spanish: barrera Jersey
Italian: barriera Jersey

K

Korean barbecue
Definition: A method of grilling meat at the dining table.
Origin: Traditional Korean cooking method dating back centuries; popularized internationally in the late 20th century.
Portuguese: churrasco coreano
Spanish: barbacoa coreana
Italian: barbecue coreano

L

Latin lover
Definition: Stereotype of a passionate, romantic man from Latin cultures.
Origin: Hollywood stereotype from the 1920s, epitomized by actors like Rudolph Valentino.
Portuguese: amante latino
Spanish: amante latino
Italian: latin lover

M

Manila envelope
Definition: A sturdy, buff-colored envelope.
Origin: Originally made from Manila hemp (abaca) from the Philippines, known for its strength.
Portuguese: envelope Manila / envelope pardo
Spanish: sobre Manila
Italian: busta Manila

Mexican standoff
Definition: A confrontation where no party can win, often with three or more opponents at an impasse.
Origin: American Western term from the late 19th century, possibly from frontier conflicts involving Mexican, American, and Native populations.
Portuguese: impasse mexicano / situação sem saída
Spanish: punto muerto mexicano
Italian: stallo messicano

Mexican wave
Definition: A crowd wave effect where spectators stand and sit in sequence.
Origin: Popularized at the 1986 FIFA World Cup in Mexico, though similar waves existed earlier.
Portuguese: ola / onda mexicana
Spanish: ola mexicana
Italian: ola messicana

Mongolian barbecue
Definition: A style of cooking where diners select ingredients cooked on a large griddle.
Origin: Created in Taiwan in the 1950s by Wu Zhaonan; not actually from Mongolia despite the name.

Portuguese: churrasco mongol
Spanish: barbacoa mongola
Italian: barbecue mongolo

Moscow mule
Definition: A cocktail made with vodka, ginger beer, and lime juice.
Origin: Created in 1940s Los Angeles to promote vodka; "Moscow" referenced vodka's Russian origin.
Portuguese: Moscow mule
Spanish: Moscow mule
Italian: Moscow mule

N

Neapolitan ice cream
Definition: Ice cream with three flavors (typically chocolate, vanilla, strawberry) side by side.
Origin: Named after Naples, Italy, though the specific three-flavor combination is an American innovation.
Portuguese: sorvete napolitano
Spanish: helado napolitano
Italian: gelato napoletano

New York minute
Definition: An extremely short period of time; instantly.
Origin: From the fast-paced lifestyle associated with New York City.
Portuguese: num piscar de olhos / instantaneamente
Spanish: en un abrir y cerrar de ojos
Italian: in un batter d'occhio

Norwegian salmon
Definition: Farmed Atlantic salmon.
Origin: Norway pioneered salmon farming in the 1970s and dominates global production.
Portuguese: salmão norueguês
Spanish: salmón noruego
Italian: salmone norvegese

P

Pardon my French
Definition: An apology for using profanity or crude language.
Origin: 19th century English expression, possibly from English speakers excusing French loan words, or associating French with risqué topics.
Portuguese: desculpe o palavrão / com perdão da palavra
Spanish: perdón por la expresión
Italian: scusate il francesismo

Persian carpet
Definition: An ornate, hand-woven rug from Iran.
Origin: Persian (Iranian) carpet-weaving tradition dates back over 2,500 years, renowned worldwide for quality and artistry.
Portuguese: tapete persa
Spanish: alfombra persa
Italian: tappeto persiano

Philadelphia lawyer
Definition: A shrewd, clever attorney skilled at finding legal loopholes.
Origin: From the 1735 trial of John Peter Zenger in New York, where Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton secured an acquittal.
Portuguese: advogado astuto
Spanish: abogado astuto
Italian: avvocato astuto

Polish the floor
Definition: To clean or shine a floor.
Origin: From the verb "to polish" (make shiny), which coincidentally is spelled like the nationality "Polish."
Portuguese: polir o chão / encerar o chão
Spanish: pulir el suelo / encerar el piso
Italian: lucidare il pavimento

R

Roman holiday
Definition: Entertainment derived from others' suffering.
Origin: From gladiatorial games in ancient Rome; popularized by Byron's poem "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (1812-1818).
Portuguese: diversão à custa do sofrimento alheio
Spanish: diversión a costa del sufrimiento ajeno
Italian: divertimento alle spese altrui

Roman nose
Definition: A prominent nose with a high bridge.
Origin: From the prominent noses depicted on ancient Roman sculptures and coins.
Portuguese: nariz romano / nariz aquilino
Spanish: nariz romana / nariz aguileña
Italian: naso romano / naso aquilino

Roman numerals
Definition: The number system using letters (I, V, X, L, C, D, M).
Origin: System used in ancient Rome, still used for specific purposes today.
Portuguese: números romanos
Spanish: números romanos
Italian: numeri romani

Russian doll
Definition: A set of wooden dolls of decreasing size nested inside each other; also called matryoshka.
Origin: Created in Russia in 1890 by Sergey Malyutin and Vasily Zvyozdochkin, inspired by Japanese nesting dolls.
Portuguese: boneca russa / matrioshka
Spanish: muñeca rusa / matrioshka
Italian: matrioska

Russian roulette
Definition: A dangerous game of chance involving a revolver with one bullet, each player spinning the cylinder and pulling the trigger at their head.
Origin: First described in Mikhail Lermontov's 1840 story "The Fatalist"; became widely known through 20th century literature.
Portuguese: roleta russa
Spanish: ruleta rusa
Italian: roulette russa

S

Scotch tape
Definition: Transparent adhesive tape (brand name).
Origin: Created by 3M in 1930; called "Scotch" because it was initially sold with adhesive only on edges, perceived as "stingy" like the Scottish stereotype.
Portuguese: fita adesiva / durex (marca)
Spanish: cinta adhesiva / scotch
Italian: nastro adesivo / scotch

Scotch whisky
Definition: Whisky distilled in Scotland from malted barley.
Origin: Scottish whisky production dates back to at least the 15th century; now protected by law.
Portuguese: uísque escocês
Spanish: whisky escocés
Italian: whisky scozzese

Shanghai (verb)
Definition: To coerce or trick someone into doing something, especially by drugging and forcing into ship service.
Origin: From the practice in 19th century port cities of kidnapping men to crew ships sailing to Shanghai, China.
Portuguese: sequestrar / coagir
Spanish: secuestrar / coaccionar
Italian: costringere con l'inganno

Siamese twins
Definition: Conjoined twins (now considered outdated/offensive term).
Origin: From Chang and Eng Bunker (1811-1874), conjoined twins from Siam (now Thailand) who became famous performers.
Portuguese: gêmeos siameses (termo desatualizado; preferir "gêmeos unidos")
Spanish: gemelos siameses (término desactualizado; preferir "gemelos unidos")
Italian: gemelli siamesi (termine obsoleto; preferire "gemelli congiunti")

Spanish flu
Definition: The 1918-1919 influenza pandemic.
Origin: Named because Spain, neutral in WWI, freely reported the outbreak while warring nations censored news; likely didn't originate in Spain.
Portuguese: gripe espanhola
Spanish: gripe española
Italian: influenza spagnola

Spanish fly
Definition: A supposed aphrodisiac made from crushed beetles (cantharidin); actually a dangerous toxin.
Origin: Named after the beetle Lytta vesicatoria found in southern Europe including Spain; used since ancient times despite being highly toxic.
Portuguese: cantárida / mosca espanhola
Spanish: mosca española / cantárida
Italian: cantaride / mosca spagnola

Spanish Inquisition

Definition: A historical tribunal; used idiomatically for unexpected interrogation or persecution.
Origin: Established in 1478 by Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella; notorious for trials of heretics. Popularized by Monty Python sketch.
Portuguese: Inquisição Espanhola
Spanish: Inquisición Española
Italian: Inquisizione spagnola

Swedish massage
Definition: A therapeutic massage technique using long strokes, kneading, friction, and vibration.
Origin: Developed by Swedish physiologist Per Henrik Ling in the early 19th century as part of medical gymnastics.
Portuguese: massagem sueca
Spanish: masaje sueco
Italian: massaggio svedese

Swiss Army knife
Definition: A multi-tool pocket knife with various attachments.
Origin: Originally supplied to Swiss Army soldiers in 1891; manufactured by Victorinox and Wenger.
Portuguese: canivete suíço
Spanish: navaja suiza
Italian: coltellino svizzero

Swiss bank account
Definition: A bank account in Switzerland, associated with secrecy and security.
Origin: Swiss banking secrecy laws from 1934 made these accounts famous for confidentiality.
Portuguese: conta bancária suíça
Spanish: cuenta bancaria suiza
Italian: conto bancario svizzero

Swiss cheese
Definition: Cheese with holes, typically Emmental or similar varieties.
Origin: Emmental cheese from Switzerland, with characteristic holes (eyes) formed by bacterial fermentation.
Portuguese: queijo suíço
Spanish: queso suizo
Italian: formaggio svizzero

T

Thai massage
Definition: A traditional healing technique combining acupressure, stretching, and yoga positions.
Origin: Ancient Thai healing practice dating back over 2,500 years, influenced by Indian Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine.
Portuguese: massagem tailandesa
Spanish: masaje tailandés
Italian: massaggio thailandese

Trojan horse
Definition: A deceptive strategy or device that allows entry or access.
Origin: From Greek mythology; Greeks hid soldiers inside a wooden horse to enter Troy; described in Virgil's Aeneid and Homer's Odyssey.
Portuguese: cavalo de Troia
Spanish: caballo de Troya
Italian: cavallo di Troia

Turkey (the bird)
Definition: A large bird native to North America, domesticated for food.
Origin: Mistakenly named by Europeans who confused it with guinea fowl imported via Turkey; the name stuck despite the geographical error.
Portuguese: peru
Spanish: pavo
Italian: tacchino

Turkish bath
Definition: A steam bath followed by massage and relaxation.
Origin: Traditional bathing practice from the Ottoman Empire, continuing Roman-Byzantine bathing traditions.
Portuguese: banho turco
Spanish: baño turco
Italian: bagno turco

Turkish coffee
Definition: Finely ground coffee boiled with water and sugar, served unfiltered.
Origin: Traditional Ottoman method of coffee preparation dating to the 15th century.
Portuguese: café turco
Spanish: café turco
Italian: caffè turco

Turkish delight

Definition: A sweet confection made with starch, sugar, and flavorings, often with nuts.
Origin: Traditional Ottoman confection (lokum) dating back centuries; became popular in Western Europe in the 19th century.
Portuguese: delícia turca / lokum
Spanish: delicia turca / lokum
Italian: delizia turca / lokum

V

Venetian blind
Definition: A window covering made of horizontal slats that can be tilted to control light.
Origin: Introduced to Paris from Venice in the 18th century; Venetian traders had adapted Persian window coverings.
Portuguese: persiana veneziana
Spanish: persiana veneciana
Italian: veneziana

Vienna sausage
Definition: A small, thin parboiled sausage, often canned.
Origin: Named after Vienna (Wien), Austria, inspired by Wiener Würstchen, though the canned American version differs from the original.
Portuguese: salsicha Viena
Spanish: salchicha de Viena
Italian: würstel viennese

W

Welsh rabbit / Welsh rarebit
Definition: A dish of melted cheese sauce served over toast.
Origin: 18th century British dish; "rabbit" was likely a humorous name suggesting the Welsh were too poor to afford real rabbit.
Portuguese: torrada galesa com queijo
Spanish: tostada galesa con queso
Italian: toast gallese al formaggio

When in Rome, do as the Romans do
Definition: Adapt to the customs of the place you are visiting.

Origin: Attributed to Saint Ambrose in the 4th century, advising Saint Augustine about varying religious customs in different cities.
Portuguese: quando em Roma, faça como os romanos
Spanish: cuando en Roma, haz como los romanos
Italian: paese che vai, usanza che trovi

Y

Yankee
Definition: A person from the northern United States; or an American in general (outside the US).
Origin: Uncertain etymology; possibly from Dutch "Janke" (little Jan), or from Native American pronunciation of "English." Used since 18th century.
Portuguese: ianque
Spanish: yanqui
Italian: yankee

Yorkshire pudding
Definition: A baked pudding made from batter, traditionally served with roast beef.
Origin: Traditional English dish from Yorkshire county, dating to the 18th century.
Portuguese: pudim de Yorkshire
Spanish: pudín de Yorkshire
Italian: Yorkshire pudding

Additional Expressions

All Greek to me - see "Greek to me"

Anglo-Saxon
Definition: Relating to Germanic peoples who inhabited England; used broadly for English-speaking cultures.
Origin: From the Angles and Saxons who migrated to Britain in the 5th-6th centuries.
Portuguese: anglo-saxão
Spanish: anglosajón
Italian: anglosassone

Apache dance

Definition: A dramatic dance depicting a violent relationship between a pimp and prostitute.
Origin: Created in Parisian cafés around 1900, named after Apache gangs in Paris, not Native Americans.
Portuguese: dança apache
Spanish: danza apache
Italian: danza apache

Bermuda shorts
Definition: Knee-length shorts.
Origin: Adopted by British military in Bermuda in early 20th century for hot weather; became acceptable business attire there.
Portuguese: bermuda
Spanish: bermudas
Italian: bermuda

Boston marriage
Definition: Two women living together in a long-term relationship.
Origin: Late 19th century New England term, from Henry James's novel "The Bostonians" (1886).
Portuguese: casamento bostoniano
Spanish: matrimonio bostoniano
Italian: matrimonio bostoniano

Brazilian blowout
Definition: A semi-permanent hair straightening treatment.
Origin: Developed in Brazil in the 2000s using keratin treatment to smooth hair.
Portuguese: escova progressiva
Spanish: alisado brasileño
Italian: stiratura brasiliana

Brussels lace
Definition: Fine needlepoint or bobbin lace.
Origin: Produced in Brussels since the 15th century; considered among the finest lace in Europe.
Portuguese: renda de Bruxelas
Spanish: encaje de Bruselas
Italian: pizzo di Bruxelles

Buffalo wings
Definition: Deep-fried chicken wings coated in spicy sauce.
Origin: Created at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo, New York in 1964 by Teressa Bellissimo.
Portuguese: asinhas de frango picantes

Spanish: alitas de búfalo
Italian: ali di pollo piccanti

Champagne
Definition: Sparkling wine from the Champagne region of France.
Origin: Developed in the Champagne region; name protected by law since 1891.
Portuguese: champanhe
Spanish: champán
Italian: champagne

Cheddar cheese
Definition: A firm, cow's milk cheese.
Origin: From the village of Cheddar in Somerset, England, where it was produced in caves since at least the 12th century.
Portuguese: queijo cheddar
Spanish: queso cheddar
Italian: formaggio cheddar

Cognac
Definition: A type of brandy from the Cognac region of France.
Origin: Distilled wine from the Cognac region; name protected by Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée.
Portuguese: conhaque
Spanish: coñac
Italian: cognac

Cologne
Definition: A lightly scented perfume.
Origin: Eau de Cologne was created in Cologne, Germany in 1709 by Italian perfumer Johann Maria Farina.
Portuguese: colônia
Spanish: colonia
Italian: acqua di colonia

Corinthian leather
Definition: A marketing term for luxury car upholstery.
Origin: Coined by advertising executives for Chrysler in the 1970s; has no connection to Corinth, Greece.
Portuguese: couro corinthiano
Spanish: cuero corinto
Italian: pelle corinzia

Darjeeling tea
Definition: Black tea from the Darjeeling district in India.

Origin: Cultivated in the Darjeeling region of West Bengal since the mid-19th century by the British.
Portuguese: chá Darjeeling
Spanish: té Darjeeling
Italian: tè Darjeeling

Dijon mustard
Definition: A smooth, pale yellow mustard.
Origin: From Dijon, France, where it has been produced since the Middle Ages; recipe standardized in 1850s.
Portuguese: mostarda Dijon
Spanish: mostaza Dijon
Italian: senape di Digione

Egyptian cotton
Definition: High-quality cotton with extra-long fibers.
Origin: Developed in Egypt in the 19th century from imported plants; ideal climate produces superior cotton.
Portuguese: algodão egípcio
Spanish: algodón egipcio
Italian: cotone egiziano

Feta cheese
Definition: A brined curd cheese from Greece.
Origin: Ancient Greek cheese mentioned in Homer's Odyssey; name "feta" means "slice" in Greek.
Portuguese: queijo feta
Spanish: queso feta
Italian: formaggio feta

Florentine
Definition: A dish served on a bed of spinach; or a cookie with nuts and candied fruit.
Origin: Named after Florence, Italy; Catherine de' Medici supposedly brought spinach dishes from Florence to France.
Portuguese: florentina
Spanish: florentina
Italian: alla fiorentina

Gestapo tactics
Definition: Brutal, intimidating interrogation or investigation methods.
Origin: From the Geheime Staatspolizei (Secret State Police) of Nazi Germany, known for ruthless methods.
Portuguese: táticas da Gestapo

Spanish: tácticas de la Gestapo
Italian: tattiche della Gestapo

Gordian knot
Definition: An intractable problem solved by bold action.
Origin: From legend of Alexander the Great cutting the complex Gordian knot in ancient Phrygia rather than untying it.
Portuguese: nó górdio
Spanish: nudo gordiano
Italian: nodo gordiano

Havana cigar
Definition: A premium cigar from Cuba.
Origin: Cigars have been produced in Havana, Cuba since the 16th century; Cuban cigars are world-renowned.
Portuguese: charuto Havana
Spanish: puro habano
Italian: sigaro avana

Himalayan salt
Definition: Pink-colored rock salt from Pakistan.
Origin: Mined primarily in the Khewra Salt Mine in Punjab, Pakistan, near the Himalayas.
Portuguese: sal do Himalaia
Spanish: sal del Himalaya
Italian: sale dell'Himalaya

Hollandaise sauce
Definition: A rich sauce made with egg yolks, butter, and lemon.
Origin: French sauce possibly named after Holland; first recorded in French cuisine in the 17th century.
Portuguese: molho holandês
Spanish: salsa holandesa
Italian: salsa olandese

Hong Kong flu
Definition: The 1968-1969 influenza pandemic.
Origin: First identified in Hong Kong in 1968; caused by H3N2 influenza virus.
Portuguese: gripe de Hong Kong
Spanish: gripe de Hong Kong
Italian: influenza di Hong Kong

Karate
Definition: A Japanese martial art using striking techniques.

Origin: Developed in Okinawa, Japan from indigenous fighting styles and Chinese martial arts.
Portuguese: caratê
Spanish: kárate
Italian: karate

Limerick
Definition: A humorous five-line poem with AABBA rhyme scheme.
Origin: Uncertain; possibly from the city of Limerick, Ireland, or from 18th century soldiers' songs.
Portuguese: limerick
Spanish: limerick
Italian: limerick

Mecca
Definition: A place that attracts many visitors; a center of activity for a specified group.
Origin: From Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the holiest city in Islam and destination for Muslim pilgrimage.
Portuguese: meca
Spanish: meca
Italian: mecca

Molotov cocktail
Definition: An improvised incendiary weapon made with a bottle of flammable liquid.
Origin: Named sarcastically after Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov during the Winter War (1939-40).
Portuguese: coquetel Molotov
Spanish: cóctel Molotov
Italian: bottiglia Molotov

Parmesan cheese
Definition: A hard, granular cheese.
Origin: Parmigiano-Reggiano from Parma and Reggio Emilia regions of Italy, produced since the Middle Ages.
Portuguese: queijo parmesão
Spanish: queso parmesano
Italian: parmigiano

Pyrrhic victory
Definition: A victory won at too great a cost.
Origin: From King Pyrrhus of Epirus, who defeated Romans in 279 BCE but suffered devastating losses.

Portuguese: vitória de Pirro
Spanish: victoria pírrica
Italian: vittoria di Pirro

Sardonic
Definition: Grimly mocking or cynical.
Origin: From "Sardinian herb" (ranunculus sardous), said to cause facial convulsions resembling bitter laughter.
Portuguese: sardônico
Spanish: sardónico
Italian: sardonico

Spartan
Definition: Marked by simplicity, frugality, or self-discipline.
Origin: From ancient Sparta, known for austere, disciplined lifestyle and military culture.
Portuguese: espartano
Spanish: espartano
Italian: spartano

Stoic
Definition: Enduring pain or hardship without showing feelings.
Origin: From Stoicism, philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium at the Stoa Poikile in Athens, circa 300 BCE.
Portuguese: estoico
Spanish: estoico
Italian: stoico

Tantalize
Definition: To torment by showing something desirable but out of reach.
Origin: From Tantalus in Greek mythology, punished by being unable to reach food and water despite eternal hunger and thirst.
Portuguese: tantalizador / atormentar
Spanish: tentar / atormentar
Italian: stuzzicare / tormentare

Waterloo
Definition: A decisive or final defeat.
Origin: From Napoleon's final defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, Belgium in 1815.
Portuguese: Waterloo (derrota final)
Spanish: Waterloo (derrota definitiva)
Italian: Waterloo (sconfitta definitiva)

This dictionary contains over 150 expressions related to countries, nationalities, cities, and regions. Many reflect historical relationships between nations, cultural practices, stereotypes, or geographical origins of products and customs.